XI.

CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE PRESENT CENTURY.

A

BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATES

OF THE

COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON, SO. CA.

DELIVERED IN

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH,

AT THE

ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

31ST OCTOBER, 1834.

BY REV. J. ADAMS,

President of the College of Charleston, So. Carolina; and (ex-officio) Horry Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy; Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, held at Boston; Member of the Columbian Institute, held at Washington, District of Columbia; Corresponding Member of the Massachusetts' Historical Society; Honorary Member of the Historical Society of New-York; Member of the Philosophical Society of South-Carolina; &c. &c.

CHARLESTON:
PRINTED BY BURGES & HONOUR,
18 BROAD-STREET.
1836.

JBC
378.37
Ad8c

To HENRY LEWIS BARKER,
JOHN ALEXANDER GYLES,
JAMES STUART HANCKEL,
PATRICK FOOTE HOLLAND,
ROBERT THEUS HOWARD,
WILLIAM WULFF KUNHARDT,
FRANCIS BEEKMAN LEE,
JOHN SMITH MITCHELL,
JOB PALMER PILLANS,
BENJAMIN GARDEN PRINGLE,
SAMUEL RILEY,
JOHN HUME SIMONS,
SEAMAN DEAS SINKLER, and
CHRISTOPHER FITZSIMONS STONEY,

Graduates of the College of Charleston, at the Commencement 31*st October*, 1834;—*this Address written at their request, is respectfully inscribed by the*

AUTHOR.

ADDRESS.

Gentlemen Graduates of the Day:—There are occasions in the course of human life, on which it is profitable, carefully to examine the present and review the past; and combining our experience of the one with our knowledge of the other, to direct our reflections to the future. Such, by the general consent of mankind, is the season, when youth being set free from the restraints imposed by parents, guardians and instructors, are about to engage in the business, and to assume the responsibilities of manhood. In accordance with this common and natural sentiment, while some nations have been contented to mark this limit between youth and manhood, simply by legal enactment,—others have celebrated its arrival by customary ceremonies of a significant, and sometimes of an imposing kind. Among the Germans of the age of Tacitus, in conformity with the fierceness of the national spirit, and the warlike character of the times, the youth aspiring to the honors and privileges of manhood, was solemnly presented with a shield and a spear, in the presence of the wise, the valiant, and the honorable of the land.* By the singular policy of the Romans, the father's authority over his child was never relinquished, and extended to the disposal of his fortune and even of his life;† and therefore, strictly speaking, there was no dividing line between the periods of youth and manhood; no well known time, when the young man became master of his own time and actions, (*sui juris*);—still in the case of sons, this stern rule was in some measure relaxed as they approached the age of discretion. When the youthful Roman had completed his seventeenth year, on a particular day, in the open forum, and in the presence of the assembled citizens, he was invested with the robe of manhood, (*toga virilis*) and was commended to the care of some distinguished citizen, with whom afterwards, he was privileged freely to associate, whose office it was to guide him in his studies, to watch over his habits, manners and morals; and to aid him in preparing himself to perform the responsible duties of Roman citizenship.‡ Strongly analogous to the time when the Roman youth were publicly invested with the robe of manhood, is the

---

* De Mor. Ger. c. 13. † Adam's Rom. Ant. p. 51. ‡ Vattel's Law of Nations, B. 1. c. 11. Sec. 112.—Cicero De Amicitia, c. 1.—de Officiis, Lib. II. c. 13.

critical and interesting period at which you, young gentlemen, have arrived;—and this day in the presence of the wise, the learned, the beautiful and the honorable of our city, you have displayed the first fruits of the instruction which you have received. The ceremonies of this occasion, while they free you from the restraints of a College life, must also withdraw from you, much of the friendly counsel and guidance which you have been accustomed to receive; and you must hereafter assume, in a much greater measure, the responsibilitiy of directing your own course on the perilous voyage of life which is before you. Under these circumstances, I trust, it will not be considered inappropriate to my office, or to the interesting and confidential relation, which has so long subsisted between us, if I ask your attention to some brief observations, which, it may be presumed, will be the last instruction and advice, which I shall ever be called to impart to you.

Among the many subjects from which a choice might be made on which to address you, I have thought that no one could be more suitable to myself or useful to you, than a brief notice of the well defined characteristics, by which, the age in which, by the Providence of God, you are called to live and to act, is distinguished, in some important respects, from all that have gone before it in the history of the world. It is of the last importance, that every man coming upon the stage of life, should well understand the spirit of the times in which he is called to act a part, whether such part be in a superior or in a subordinate sphere.

1. It is not among the least interesting and well defined characteristics of the present times, that our efforts for the enlargement of man's dominion over physical nature, have met with such decisive success.

Illustrations of this position, might be drawn from many sources; but there is one so remarkable and so striking, that I may well be justified in referring to it, to the neglect of every other. Whether we consider steam-machinery with reference to the principles on which it is constructed, or to its multifarious applications by which human power has been so vastly augmented, we must regard it as the most interesting, the most beneficial, and the most wonderful of all the productions of human genius. The name of Watt, to whose ardor, skill and perseverance we are chiefly indebted, for bringing the Steam-Engine to its present state of perfection, and applying it to useful purposes, will be associated in all future times, with this greatest and most successful triumph of science over physical difficulties. The most accomplished writer of the present century, has left us a description both of the instrument and its illustrious improver, and his splendid powers were no more than adequate to do justice to such a subject. I should feel myself to be in the wrong, if I were to omit making his description a part of this illustration. "He (Mr. Watt,) was a man, says Sir Walter Scott, whose genius discovered the means of multiplying our national resources, to a degree, perhaps, even beyond his own stupendous powers of calculation and combination; bringing the treasures of the abyss to the surface of the earth; giving the feeble arm of man, the momentum of an Afrite; commanding manufactures to arise, as the rod of the prophet produced water in the desert; affording the means of dispensing with that time and tide which wait for no man; of sailing without that wind which defied the commands and

threats of Xerxes himself. This potent commander of the elements, this abridger of time and space, this magician, whose cloudy machinery has produced a change in the world, the effects of which, extraordinary as they are, are perhaps only now beginning to be felt, was not only the most profound man of science, the most successful combiner of powers and calculator of numbers as adapted to practical purposes, was not only one of the most generally well informed, but one of the best and kindest of human beings. In his 84th year, his attention was at every one's question, his information at every one's command.*" Such instances of the highest order of talents, combined with such exemplary virtues, breathe a reviving freshness on all who are made acquainted with them.†

It was more than intimated in the passage just cited, that the Steam-Engine was still to receive new developments and new applications; and in this, the anticipations of this great writer have not been disappointed. In the invention and capabilities of the railway, the success of which, rests on the safe basis of experiment, it would seem as if almost no projector could be too sanguine, and almost no anticipations could be accused of extravagance. On the bosom of the ocean, we sail in floating palaces, borne onward as if by enchantment,—on the land, we fly, as it were, on the wings of the wind.

It is now half a century, since Dr. Darwin, with equal poetical enthusiasm and prophetic truth, thus spoke of the future triumphs of the steam engine.

> "Soon shall thy arm, unconquered steam, afar,
> Drag the slow barge, or drive the rapid car;
> Or on wide waving wing expanded bear,
> The flying chariot through the fields of air;
> Fair crews triumphant, leaning from above,
> Shall wave their fluttering kerchiefs as they move,
> Or warrior bands alarm the gaping crowd,
> And armies shrink beneath the shadowy cloud."

Our country has probably, a thousand miles of railway completed within its limits; and an enterprise of this kind is now making satisfactory progress, which is to ascend the great barrier of the Alleghanies, and to unite the Atlantic coast with the beautiful and majestic Ohio, and by this, with the great valley of the Mississippi. We may, moreover, indulge the sanguine hope, that the similar enterprise which our own citizens have undertaken, may, its chief difficulties being overcome, contribute effectually to revive the declining fortunes of our city, so long the chosen abode of hospitality, courtesy and honor.

2. Nor have the times in which we live been less distinguished for the cultivation and advancement of the sciences, than for enlarging man's dominion over the elements of nature, and directing them to the accomplishment of practical and beneficial purposes.

The celebrated La Place, has remarked a striking difference between literature and science, as their progress side by side is traced in the annals of learning. Literature consisting of delineations of human feelings and passions displayed on interesting, and especially on trying occasions, of exhibitions of character, of the creations of the imagination, and

* Quoted in Brande's Manual of Chemistry, vol. I, p. 125, London, 1821. †See Nat. Gaz. 25th July, 1835.

the combinations of the fancy, and of descriptions of the scenery of the land, the ocean and the sky; success in cultivating it may fairly be expected by all who can feel, who have opportunities to observe, and who can suitably combine, and skilfully describe what they feel and what they observe; while science is chiefly the product of long continued observation, of patient and laborious experiment, or of abstruse calculation. Hence it is, that while the literature of ancient times, continues to instruct and delight us, and displays a fulness, richness and freshness which have not been surpassed, if they have been equalled, by modern literature,—the remains of ancient science are scanty and imperfect, and we must have recourse to modern scientific treatises, if we expect satisfaction in our enquiries. Even the beautiful system of the Greek geometry has been superseded by the treatises of the French mathematicians, and is no longer practically useful to us, except as a model of clear and rigorous demonstration. Algebra was nearly unknown to the ancients, but under the form of the transcendental analysis, and in the hands of Newton, Euler, La Grange, La Place, Poisson and Ivory, it has been astonishingly fruitful in the most valuable results, and by its aid, physical astronomy, to the investigations of which this instrument alone is adequate, has become the most perfect of all the sciences. The researches of Coulomb on electric and magnetic attractions, have, by his arriving at the law which governs them, given unity to the scattered fragments of which these subtle sciences were before composed. Chemistry so rich in practical applications, and so surprising for the insight which it gives into the interior structure of material substances, is almost entirely the fruit of the skill and enterprise of the passing century. The natural historian is not now held to be accomplished in his department of science, unless, by the inspection of a few of even the smaller bones of an animal, found perhaps far beneath the surface of the earth, he has the skill to determine, whether it belonged to any existing species, or whether its species has become extinct; and if extinct, in what order and with what genus it is to be arranged.* From organic remains buried in the strata of the earth, it has been attempted, and not without some success, to determine the number and nature of the revolutions which our globe has undergone, and the series of animated races which have successively occupied its surface.

A principle of science often becomes a rule of art; and hence it is, that we are, in a great measure, ultimately indebted to science for improvements in those arts which confer fresh value on life itself, by adding to the enjoyments which constitute much of its value. The researches of Physical Astronomy have given the most admirable precision to our lunar and solar tables;—these have given increased accuracy to our determinations of the longitude;—and this again has imparted un-

* See Boston Journal of Philosophy and the Arts, vol. I. 260. Miss Edgeworth has made good use of the wonderful skill acquired by the greatest of modern natural historians,—she says, "as Cuvier could tell from the first sight of a single bone what the animal was, what were its habits, and to what class it belonged, so any person early used to good company can, by the first gesture, the first general manner of being, passive or active, tell whether a stranger, even scarcely seen, is or is not a gentleman."—*Helen* I. 92.

exampled security to navigation, and to the lives of those "who go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business upon the great waters."* By experiment, Mr. Dollond ascertained the fact, that the dispersive power of different optical media is not proportioned to their mean refractive power, a fact which had escaped the sagacity of Sir Isaac Newton;—and this led to a most valuable improvement in the structure of refracting telescopes. Baron Napier, when he invented Logarithms, with all his sagacity and depth of thought, knew not the richness of the vein he was working; he did not foresee, that in the future progress of the mathematical sciences, they were scarcely to advance a step, without developing some new consequences of his prolific invention, and some new applications of it to branches of science, which, in his time, had no existence. Thus it is, ever has been, and must ever continue to be;—the works of nature are inexhaustible in their extent and in their relations to each other; the sciences now known will continue to advance, and others will spring up, crowning life with the conveniences, comforts and elegancies, which it is their office to dispense with so liberal a hand.

3. Another prominent characteristic of the times in which we live, is the system of foreign colonization pursued by the principal maritime nations, especially by Great Britain.

Colonial establishments, it is true, were well known in ancient times; but the spirit in which they originated, was widely different from that of the modern establishments called by the same name. The Grecian colonies were the offspring of individual enterprise; the mother country neither claimed nor exercised any substantial authority over them, and they yielded nothing more than a nominal submission and respect.† The Roman establishments which have been called colonies, and compared with those of our times, were military stations; garrisons placed in conquered countries; advanced posts of a great army, and corresponded very much to the advanced military stations posted in our Western wilderness, designed to protect our frontier settlements and preserve peace among the Indian tribes.‡

The modern system of colonization commenced with Columbus, and has since kept pace with the progress of maritime and inland discovery. The consequences of this system are still unfolding themselves to our view, and by the light of the past, we may anticipate future results, rather with the confidence which attends demonstration than with that which belongs to contingencies. Between the years 1607 and 1733, thirteen British colonies were planted along this coast. They continued feeble and struggling for existence during many years. The perils of their situation imparted to them the high qualities of an energetic will, self reliance amid difficulties, a fearless sense of independence, and an unexampled spirit of enterprise. It is now more than half a century, since they set themselves in successful array against the abuses and usurpations of the most powerful nation on the globe. A little one has become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. Ten millions of inhabitants sprung from an European ancestry, are scattered over the wide domain of our republic. New States are forming in the wilderness, and

* Ps. cvii, 23. † Brougham's Colonial Policy, Vol. I. p. 27. ‡ Idem, Vol. I. p. 15.

our wealth and population are so rapidly cumulative, that the former is supposed to increase four fold, and the latter two fold in every period of twenty-two or twenty-three years.* In fifty years from this time, our population will amount to fifty millions, and at the end of a century, to two hundred millions. The more Southern portion of this immense continent is overspread with a like system of colonial establishments.

Nor is the system of European colonization with its mighty results, destined to be confined to this continent. In the extensive, fertile, and salubrious regions of Australasia, colonies have been planted, and are beginning to flourish; the forests are disappearing, the natives are retiring, cities are rising;—and all the scenes are acting over again, which have transformed the wilds of America into the fair inheritance which we now enjoy. In a century from this time, Australasia must contain millions of British Freemen;—perhaps several sovereign States. When that day comes, what an increase of strength may we anticipate to the cause of free institutions? What vehicle of thought will then be so extensively used, as our own rich and noble language? What an extension will Christianity receive, with all its renovating, purifying, and elevating influences?

4. This is an age, in which, a vast impulse has been given to the great cause of civil and religious freedom.

The light of free institutions shone in ancient Greece with a dazzling and irregular brightness, rather than with a steady and permanent lustre. The Roman Empire at different periods of its history, fluctuated between the extremes of licentiousness and servitude.† Still in ordinary times, the Romans enjoyed no inconsiderable share of regulated freedom. Roman citizenship secured respect and honor through the wide limits of the Empire. St. Paul even in the distant and obscure province of Judea, and surrounded by persecutors, found protection from scourging in his birthright of Roman citizenship, and even "the Chief Captain was afraid, (of the consequences) after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him."‡ The spirit of the Germanic nations, which overthrew the Roman Empire, was free to the extremities of licentiousness. The majestic temple of British freedom, raised at an immense expense of life and treasure,§ was incomplete until the revolution of 1688, and our free institutions are the earliest shoots of the strong and vigorous English stock. The American revolution first practically established the great political truth, that government is instituted for the benefit of the people, and may be rightfully changed or abolished, as their interests may be found to require. How rapid has been the spread of free principles in Europe and in the more Southern portion of this continent, during the present century. And if the friends of free principles have been disappointed in some of their expectations; let us still trust to the redeeming spirit of free institutions, and maintain an unshaken faith, that, if the tree of liberty is of slow growth, its time of maturity will ultimately come, when its goodly boughs shall overshadow the earth, and its fruit shall refresh all nations.

---

* Bancroft's United States, I. p. 2. † Tacitus' Life of Agricola, C. 2. ‡ Acts xxii. 24—29. § See Vattel's Law of Nations, B. I. Ch. 2. § 24.

Religious liberty has grown up by the side of its twin sister political liberty, and has had its full share of arduous struggles and fiery trials. Freedom of conscience is even more sacred than security of person, reputation and estate; inasmuch as our imperishable interests are more valuable than our temporal welfare. Wiclif, Luther, Calvin and Cranmer first broke the yoke of ecclesiastical oppression. In our times, Mackintosh, Brougham, Wellington, and Earl Grey, have given a fresh impulse to this cause, in Great Britain, by procuring the civil disabilities of a large class of British subjects, to be abolished. We may trust, that a cause so righteous, is destined to achieve new triumphs, until the principle shall be universally acknowledged in Christian countries, that the Bible is the only authentic standard of religious truth; and until the right of private judgment in the interpretation of its contents, shall no longer be made a subject of controversy or question.

5. But there is another characteristic of the present age, still more interesting, and still more encouraging than any to which I have before adverted. At no period since the days of the Apostles and their immediate successors, have exertions, equally energetic and successful, been made for the moral and spiritual welfare of mankind. In this, as in similar undertakings universally, the great object as well as the great difficulty has always been to reach the common people; but in the vastly increased facilities for printing and in the plan of Sunday instruction, the enterprise and spirit of our times have devised a means as simple, as it promises to be effectual. Thousands of teachers and hundreds of thousands of children, from every class of society, are weekly instructed in the first rudiments of education; especially in moral and religious truth, in their duties to God, to their country and their neighbour;—and the Sunday, by this appropriation of a part of it, has, by uniting rest from labour with useful instruction, become of enhanced and before unknown value, to the laborious classes of the community.* No sight can be more gratifying than this, to every man of patriotic feeling, and in no institution can we see more convincing evidence, that our free institutions are held by a stable tenure, and are destined to a permanent existence. The enterprise, moreover, has been undertaken and successfully accomplished, of furnishing a copy of the sacred Scriptures, to every destitute family in the United States, which is willing to receive one.

The people of the United States have hazarded the experiment of refusing to connect any one form of Christianity with their civil government, or to sustain it by the arm of the civil authority. And while the people have, in their wisdom, retained the Christian religion as the basis of their moral, civil and political institutions, this has been left to depend for its existence and extension on its own intrinsic evidence and strength, and on the attachment of those who embrace its doctrines and are sustained by its consolations. The experiment is promising, but its results cannot yet be regarded as entirely decisive.† Pious, intelligent and patriotic Christians have long since perceived, that the preservation of Christianity among us, is not to be expected without united, energetic and persevering endeavours. To this end, unusual efforts are making among

* Nat. Gazette, Oct. 27, 1832. † See Boston Recorder, 14th Nov. 1834.

Christians of every name, to increase the number of faithful and well qualified ministers of the gospel. And more than a thousand young men, within the United States, are, at this time, in a course of education for the Christian ministry. The Word of Life must be comparatively feeble in its influence, without the living minister of truth, to explain its doctrines, to enforce its precepts, to administer its ordinances, and to illustrate its heavenly spirit in his life and conversation. The principle, moreover, is becoming more generally acknowledged, that success in spreading the gospel, does not depend so much on the number, as on the personal, literary, moral and religious qualifications of ministers. Hence, more adequate provision has been made, and is still making for clerical education. Our young men who are aspiring to the ministry, make themselves familiar with the best critics of Germany, as well as with the rich and various theological learning of Great Britain. Nor has the zealous and enterprising spirit of the present day, satisfied itself with the prospect of supplying our own country with a pious and learned ministry. Christians, both in the United States and in Great Britain, are looking upon the world, with an eye which embraces all unchristian nations in its comprehensive vision. They have heard the cry of nations perishing in the darkness of heathenism, and have responded to the call. Fully five hundred mission families have been established at well selected points in heathen and Mahometan countries; and within the present century, the great cause of Christianity has been crowned with the special blessing of its divine author.

Such, young gentlemen, are the characteristics of the age to which you belong, and in which you are to act a part;—and from this view of them, brief and imperfect as it is, you may understand the advantages you are to enjoy, and the obligations you are to fulfil. The great causes of literature, of science, of public and private morals, of good government and of pure religion, will all have claims upon your attention and co-operation. The advancement of these great interests, is equally essential to our national honour and national happiness. How agreeable would it be, if you could add to the stock of our rising literary wealth. The mine of our literature is, indeed, rich almost beyond example; its returns cannot fail amply to reward the enterprising and skillful workman; and Irving, Cooper, Channing, Sparks, and many others, have extracted, and are still extracting, in abundance, the golden treasures of knowledge, from its numerous and productive veins. With what honour would your names go down to all succeeding time, if you could connect them with some invention or discovery; such as will cause the names of Aristotle, of Archimedes, of Columbus, of Newton, of Locke, of La Place, of Watt and of Fulton, never to be forgotten, as long as science continues to be useful and truth remains valuable. How full of satisfaction will be the reflection, if, spared by Providence to an advanced age, you can look back upon life with a consciousness, that the great cause of public and private virtue has been advanced by your sentiments, your firmness and perseverance in withstanding vice, and more than all, by your own spotless example. How much might the cause of good government be sustained by a generation of such statesmen as Aristides, Cicero, Sully, Chatham, Franklin, Washington, Hamilton, Madison.

How full of honor, of dignity and of usefulness might your lives be, if you were to consecrate them peculiarly to the service of your Maker, Redeemer and Sanctifier, in the ministry of the everlasting gospel. How would you rise above all the transient and fading honors which man can bestow; if as heralds of the cross, you could be instrumental in turning many to righteousness, and in causing them to shine as the stars forever and ever.

But it may never be your lot to be useful and distinguished as men of learning and science, as reformers of private and public morals, as statesmen, or as ministers of the gospel of Christ. Nor is this necessary to render your future lives eminently useful and honorable. The structure of our society requires good citizens and upright men in every walk and relation of life. If your names shall never be adorned with the distinctions of literary and scientific renown; you may advance the still more important interest of universal elementary education. If you never preach the gospel of Christ, you may make its divine spirit the governing principle of your lives, and in this way, you may give it the most effectual of all recommendations. You will make the greatest of all mistakes, you will commit the most fatal of all errors, if, in forming your plans of life, you confine your views and prospects to the scene of things and events with which you are surrounded, and neglect that supreme wisdom which pertains to salvation. Time and all its concerns, in which we are now so intensely engaged, will soon be to us as the things before the deluge. One of the small number of our graduates, who belonged to the same class with those who have this day been admitted to the higher honors of the College, a youth full of health, of hope and of promise, was, a few months only after graduation, under the most afflicting circumstances, consigned to a premature grave.* It is becoming to preserve this young man in our remembrance, and it is suitable, that in his brief career and untimely end, we should see fresh illustration of the frail tenure by which we hold our own earthly existence. You see the fathers, the patrons, the guardians† of the institution fall before you; you see your own youthful associates fall by your side.

This day closes the long and interesting period, during which I have sustained the relation of a parent to you, so far as your education is concerned. Your future course will be observed by me with a kind and watchful interest. No circumstances can ever render me insensible, to whatever of good or of evil, may, hereafter, in the order of Providence, pertain to you. May heaven shed on your future paths, its kindliest, its selectest influences.

---

* Francis Kinloch Simons, was graduated at the commencement of 1831, (24th March,) together with James Adger, I. Stockton Keith Axson, William Elliott, G. H. W. Petrie, C. Cotesworth Pinckney, John P. Porcher, and James Hamilton Prioleau. On the 8th February next after his graduation, Mr. Simons was thrown from his horse and killed. He had commenced and was successfully prosecuting the study of the law. I may add, that five of those who were graduated with him are now clergymen of the most respectable talents and standing in the community.

† The following Trustees of the College died, during the three months immediately preceding the commencement, at which this address was delivered 31st October, 1831, to wit, Sedgwick Lewis Simons, Esq. on the 7th August; Elias Horry, Esq. 17th September; and Thomas S. Grimke, Esq. 1st October.